

Hebrews 3:12 in the Navajo Bible

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Ádaa ádahotłyá, shik'isóó, doo ádaa ádahotłyáággóó nihijéi bii' doo yá'át'ééhgóó nitsídaahkees doo, índa doo da'iinohdláággóó biniinaa Diyin God hináanii bits'áhidoohkah. (Hebrews 3:12)¹

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. (Hebrews 3:12)²

Introduction

It is possible to turn away from the living God. And no one denies this. What people deny is that turning away has any bearing on whether we are saved or lost. I submit that it does.

Discussion

If a converted Christian is secure, where does his or her security reside? Are we secure because of something in us? Or are we secure because of something in God? It would be consistent with the gospel to say that God is the basis for our security. But what if we turn away from God? In that case, are we not then turning away from our only basis for security?

People who don't like the direction I'm taking the argument will counter that there is no sin God can't forgive. No matter how far we fall or turn away, our God is so big that He can forgive any sin and will save us anyway. I disagree. Yes, our God can forgive any sin – if we confess that sin and turn away from it. But even God can't forgive a sin that we cherish. At issue is not what it means for God to be God, but what it means for God to forgive sin. What is the forgiveness we're talking about?

There is a story that illustrates the nature of forgiveness and I'd like to quote it at length. The story is recorded in Matthew 18. The one speaking is Jesus.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. ²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

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back what you owe me!' he demanded. ²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' ³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:23-35)

In this story, was the first debtor initially in right standing with his master? No, he owed a debt he could not possibly pay. There is a question whether the "talent" in this story is an Attic talent of about 60 pounds (lbs.), or a talent-weight of gold which would be 60 kilograms (kgs).³ There's quite a difference. Sixty kgs. would be 120 lbs. plus 12 lbs., or about 132 lbs – the weight of a small person. In either case, we're talking about a lot of money. Sixty times 10,000 would be 60,000 with an extra zero (600,000). That's if the talent we're talking about was 60 lbs. If it was 60 kg., it would be 132,000 with an extra zero (1,320,000).

What we have now is an idea of how much weight was involved – either 600,000 lbs. (300 tons) or 1,320,000 lbs. (660 tons) of either silver or gold. Now we need to know how much all this metal might be worth. As I write this in mid-February, 2009, silver is trading between \$13.25 and \$13.74 per ounce. Let's take a median value of \$13.50 for the sake of discussion. \$13.50 per ounce would be \$216.- per pound. At this rate 300 tons of silver would be worth \$129,000,000.- (\$432,000 per ton, x 300 tons). That's if it's silver, and if it's Attic talents instead of talent-weights.

If the debt was in gold, gold today is trading at more than \$940.- per ounce. Let's take \$940 for round numbers. That x 16 gives dollars per pound (= \$15,040.-), but of course we're talking about tons. Taking the smaller of the two talents, we're talking about something over nine billion dollars (\$9,024,000,000.-). With the larger talent, it would be almost 20 billion dollars (\$19,852,800,000.-). Are you beginning to see the point Jesus was making? It was a debt the man could not possibly repay. Actually 10,000 in Bible times does not just mean one more than 9,999. It's meaning is closer to something like infinity – a number no one can calculate. Translation: This was a lost man – lost and damned. That's vss. 23-25.

When the debtor asked for mercy, did he then have right standing with his master? Yes, his entire debt was forgiven. This is what happens to us at the cross. Our entire debt is forgiven so that before God we owe nothing. But don't miss what Jesus is saying. The debtor in the story starts out truly and fairly lost and then his situation changes such that he becomes truly and fairly saved. Is it possible for a lost man to be saved? Yes. The debtor in the story was lost and then his situation changes, just as ours does at the moment of conversion. That's vss. 26-27.

But the story is not over. When the debtor showed himself unmerciful, what then? Did his master tell him that, even though he had done something that made him [the master] very angry, he [the debtor] was still forgiven? I could let you find the answer in vss. 28-35, but just in case you skip over that part, the man's debt was eventually restored just as fully as it had been forgiven. At the end of the story this man was not in debt again because the debt had never really been forgiven in the first place. It was forgiven. He was saved, but lost his salvation.

³ See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talent_\(weight\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talent_(weight)).

If I'm interpreting this story correctly, our theologians are playing with fire when they tell people, Live as you please, you're still forgiven. If we turn from God and reject what He offers (not just if we stumble and fall, but if we turn from Him and reject the gift of eternal life that He offers), we are *not* still forgiven. Be wrong about something else, but don't be wrong about this. There is a theology that has the potential of lulling us into a sense of carnal security and such teaching is positively dangerous. Souls could be lost by believing they are saved regardless what they do or how they live. It is simply not true that our actions have no effect on our salvation. Paul says,

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Conclusion

My security is in Christ, not in myself. So as long as I have Him, I'm secure – completely secure, secure in a way that lacks nothing. If I were ever to separate from Christ, however, I would no longer have the same basis for security that I once had. If I lose Him, I lose it. This concept is both reasonable and biblical. But if I think I'm saved whether I have Christ or do not have Christ, that's too much security. It's possible for faith to become presumption. And yes, it's possible for a saved person to be lost, as we have just seen. It's possible to be wrong about things that affect our eternal welfare. Many people have been doing this ever since there were people.

Our verse (above) says, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." If there were no danger in turning away, why would the author issue this warning? If there is danger in turning away – not the danger of having a smaller mansion, but the danger of losing our salvation altogether – let's make sure we avoid that trap. Don't turn away!

There are many passages such as this one in the book of Hebrews. It's a theme that runs like a thread through the entire epistle. So we're not through with this. We'll have more to say about the issue of security in later papers.